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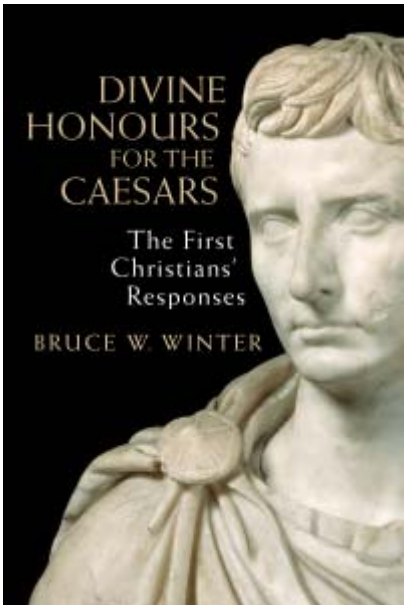

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1. Purpose of this Essay[1]

There are few New Testament scholars whose approach to research can be seen reflected as clearly in their publications as what we find in Bruce Winter's contributions to New Testament studies. His aim to understand early Christianity in its ancient context is implemented by firmly locating the New Testament writings in a framework that is built upon the analysis of historical evidence – while at the same time using the Christian texts as evidence that supplements our understanding of specific issues regarding antiquity in general. This reciprocal move can be seen most clearly in his *Philo and Paul among the Sophists*, where he uses First Corinthians to reconstruct the development of the sophistic movement in the first century CE, and in his more recent *Roman Wives*, in which he uses the

notion of "new Roman woman" as point of departure for interpreting a variety of passages in the Pauline corpus.[2] In some sense, this approach can be described as being "abductive," – as aiming at the formation of hypotheses that would, if they were true, make sense of many facts that could otherwise be integrated in alternative proposals only with difficulties.[3] Abductive proposals always have to be tested with regard to their presuppositions since they run the risk of overemphasizing explanatory potential rather than giving equal weight to the general support of their assumptions. Still, they are also responsible for creative and original contributions in many fields and form an important part of any progress of research. Since Winter's new book, *Divine Honours for the Caesars: The First Christian Responses*, proceeds along the same lines as his earlier research, it, thus, promises to be an interesting contribution – not only with regard to the subject matter under discussion, but also with regard to the approach he chooses. Accordingly, in this essay I will seek to set Winter's contribution in the broader context of the study of the early Christians' engagement with Roman ideology while focusing in particular on where his methodology might lead to promising results and where it falls short of the path chosen by other scholars.[4]

2. Winter's Explicit Approach and the State of the Discussion

Winter's book continues a trend of focusing on the Roman world in which the early Christians, in particular the members of the Pauline mission and churches, lived. However, apart from the thematic overlap with many recent studies, this continuity is less pronounced with regard to the actual argument, which Winter puts forth rather independently of recent discussions. In part, this certainly reflects his indebtedness to E. A. Judge, who is mentioned explicitly in the preface as the originator of his methodological approach that "focus[es] firstly on ancient primary sources."[5] In line with this commitment, Winter spends 100 pages discussing divine honours for the Caesars in the "Roman East" before he turns in the second part to the "First Christians' Responses" to these expressions of imperatorial veneration.[6]

The first chapter, which sets the stage for the two main parts of the book that follow, mainly focuses on explicating the rationale of the analysis. His point of departure is the fact of the remarkable spread of imperial cults during the first century CE.[7] Since there was "intense social pressures brought to bear on all provincials and Roman citizens residing in the East" to participate in imperial cults,[8] this would also have applied to the first Christians, as Winter notes with reference to earlier authors who had affirmed this fundamental conflict.[9] This sphere would have been an "inescapable challenge" for those Christians because they faced "a powerful, all-pervasive and competing messianic-like ideology propagated and publicly endorsed empire-wide ever since Augustus, in all the cities where the Christian message took root."[10] In his discussion of recent developments within the study of "imperial cultic veneration," he refers in particular to S. R. F. Price's *Rituals and Power* as a paradigm-shifting work[11] and to D. Fishwick's enormous *The Imperial Cult in the Latin West,*[12] which offers a model for his own book in which he analogously focuses "on individual cities or provinces in the Greek East where Christians resided and are mentioned in the New Testament."[13] The section that follows then explicitly takes into view Winter's "Methodological Approach" as well as the aim of the book.[14] Again, Winter indicates that he will follow the model of Judge in his analysis.[15] If one looks for more specific statements regarding the methodology, one finds in particular statements on the *material basis* that is taken into account: official inscriptions,[16] imperial cult temples,[17] and coins.[18] Moreover, Winter explains how his present analysis relates to his *individual history of engagement* with this topic, including visits to archaeological sites[19] and his earlier publications.[20]

What is at least as revealing as these explicit comments is what is not discussed. First, the almost complete absence of references to recent contributions within the field of New Testament studies is striking. The complete absence of First Peter is, for example, certainly astonishing.[21] From the perspective of Pauline studies – where the issue of Empire has been debated particularly – Winter's interaction with other voices is not much more extensive. There is a short reference to J. R. Harrison's

Paul and the Imperial Authorities at Thessalonica and Rome as an exemplary study that takes into account epigraphic evidence,[22] and a paragraph on J. D. Fantin's *Lord of the Entire World.*[23] There is no mention at all, however, of the literature associated with the SBL "Paul and Politics" group and, in particular, with the name of R. A. Horsley,[24] nor is there any reference to the publications by Neil Elliott and N. T. Wright, who have been pioneering in focusing on "hidden criticism" in the letters of Paul.[25] Accordingly, none of the key concepts associated with that discussion emerges here – neither the application of R. B. Hays's criteria for identifying "echoes"[26] nor the "hidden and public transcripts" introduced by the sociologist J. C. Scott for identifying the critical stance of the subordinate.[27] This also means that Winter does not discuss here the criticism that has been raised with regard to such an "anti-imperial" paradigm, including, for example, the works by S. Kim[28] and J. M. G. Barclay.[29] Barclay's essay in particular powerfully demonstrated the need for a clear methodological procedure in arguments that seek to identify statements that are critical of the Roman Empire. The importance of this analysis is demonstrated also by the fact that in his recent Pauline theology N. T. Wright structures his whole chapter 12 on Paul and Empire around Barclay's critique.[30] What is so intriguing with regard to Barclay's essay is that he points out that in order to plausibly infer a critical content within Pauline passages, one has to answer several questions whose affirmation is necessary for the validity of the hypothesis that Paul criticises the Roman Empire (a) in the subtext because (b) this is a safe way to avoid persecution:

1. Are the Pauline letters affected by the rules of public discourse at all?
2. Do these rules forbid open criticism of aspects of the Roman empire?
3. Did Paul have an exposure to these elements and perceive them as specifically Roman?
4. Can we expect him to have a critical stance towards those elements?
5. Is it reasonable in light of Paul's personality to assume that he expressed this critical stance in the subtext of his letters?

Of these questions, Winter addresses the third explicitly by arguing for the pervasive character of imperial cults, while the other issues do not emerge in the foreground of his discussion. More importantly, however, he does not deal with the underlying question of what kind of "responses" he is looking for at all. Are we, to use Scott's terminology, casting our net for a "hidden transcript in veiled form" (Elliott) or for a "hidden transcript in pure form" (Horsley; Barclay)?[31] The answer to this question has important implications for the criteria with which one must evaluate claims of having identified such "responses."

To be sure, the fact that Winter does not address explicitly the frameworks employed by other exegetes and the criticism levelled against them does not disqualify his analysis in itself. In fact, a charitable reading might trace the lack of such an introductory discussion to the fact that Winter regards the Christians' responses to have been "far from uniform,"[32] thus not suggesting the use of labels that might turn out to be too simplistic.[33] However, this can scarcely account for the fact that most of these relevant authors are not invoked later in the discussion of the relevant passages themselves Thus, we conclude that the omission we noted is at least an important observation that should be kept in mind when reading Winter's analysis of NT texts, for his conclusions have to be checked not only with regard to his explicit dialogue partners, but also with regard to advances in the study of the appropriate methodology that were achieved elsewhere.

3. Winter's Reconstruction of Emperor Worship in the East and his Implicit Approach

Chapters 2, 3 and 4 explore the significance of divine honours for Roman emperors in the East of the Empire from different angles. Winter's insightful discussions of epigraphical evidence will be especially valuable for scholars who are interested in the topic under discussion. Still, some might find it a bit difficult to follow the flow of the argument: For example, the relation between the two parts of Chapter 4, "Imperial Divine Titles Also Used of Jesus Christ" and "Honouring Emperors

who 'Declined' New Temples" seems unclear at first reading. Still, the basic points are easily understandable and richly substantiated. Accordingly, Chapter 2 mediates a good impression of how honours for Roman emperors permeated public life in the eastern provinces. Winter's analysis of the inscriptions regarding Augustus's birthday as providing a fitting occasion to begin the New Year leads him to conclude that "this evidence puts to rest any concept that only provincials initiated further imperial cult honours and not the emperor's consul from Rome."[34] This observation adds nuance to the necessary consideration of what parties were involved in the complex question of how the early Christians reacted towards emperor worship. Similarly, Chapter 3, which analyses the honours "to, for, and by" the emperor, substantiates the claim that the variegated expressions of imperial cults[35] would have resulted in social pressure on Christians to participate.[36] Similarly, the second part of Chapter 4 forcefully argues that the fact that some divine honours were declined by some Roman emperors themselves, should not be used to downplay actual rituals in the provinces and resulting social pressures for period before Domitian.[37] From a methodological perspective, several lessons can be drawn from this discussion: (1) Divine honours for Roman emperors would have been a phenomenon Paul and his congregations would have been confronted with. This is of relevance to question no. 3 mentioned above.[38] (2) The parties involved in shaping the rules of public discourse were variegated (cf. question no. 2 above). It could also involve input from Rome itself, mediated through "friends of Caesar." Further, instead of speaking of a centralised pressure imposed by the emperor on his citizens, the ambitions of the cities themselves – and corresponding pressure on members of these societies – should not be underestimated. (3) This discussion of the rules of public discourse and practice are then nuanced with reference to the Jews in Chapter 5. Winter concludes that, on the one hand, their traditional customs were officially recognised by the Romans so that they did not have to participate in imperial cults directly, while, on the other hand, they managed to express their loyalty to the emperor by integrating him into their own cultic system.[39]

Readers who are mainly interested in the "first Christians' response" to divine honours for the Roman emperors might be tempted to skip the first half of the book. However, it does not actually focus exclusively on the situation of the "Roman East" in general. Rather, Winter points several times to the *Christian* side of the question itself. Since these statements are relevant for determining how Winter explicates the aspect of the presupposed critical stance towards these divine honours – how he would respond to question no. 4 above – we will analyse them here briefly. First, it is notable that Winter begins early on in his book to speak of the "messianic-like ideology"[40] that underlies such honours.[41] This indicates – and this is made explicit later – that Winter is not only interested in praxis but also in the "ideological issues" that are involved.[42] Along these lines, the commencement of each New Year on the birthday of Augustus is said to be in conflict with the Christians, who would have seen "their Messiah's birthday as the beginning of all things given the benefits that his reign inaugurated (John 1:1–14)."[43] Most of these claims, which are sprinkled throughout these chapters, are based on some lexical parallel and a resulting "inevitable ideological clash."[44] For example, speaking about the term εὐαγγέλιον, Winter notes – with reference to Luke 2:10–12 – that there was "already an ideological clash with the saviour of the Christians and that of the citizens of Rome."[45] Moreover, the whole first part of Chapter 4 is devoted to "imperial divine titles" that are also "used of Jesus Christ."[46] This passage[47] contains some of the most valuable material in Winter's work. At the same time, it is precisely here that most critics will probably identify a weak point in his argument. Here, the lack of interaction with the criticism of Barclay and others becomes most visible since he does not address explicitly how – or to what extent – one can justify the move from lexical parallel to something like an "anti-thesis."[48] The fact that Winter's discussion takes place independently of the rest of the NT scholarly discourse on this issue[49] is also unfortunate since some of his considerations might be judged to contribute significantly to that conversation – once they are recognised as being a potential voice in that discussion. For example, his emphasis on the conceptual level and the exclusivity of early Christian Christology might counter some of the objection put forward by Barclay: While the Christians' compatriots could "readily

incorporate the concept of the reigning emperor as 'a god, a son of a god,'" in the Christians' perception, there was no room for such a concept, and such titles would have been perceived as "rival claims."[50] In any case, taking this conversation into account would certainly have resulted in a stronger argument in many places. In particular, Winter's discussion of *pontifex maximus* as ἀρχιερεύς seems to call for taking into account Barclay's critique, for it seems by no means clear that in Hebrews 5:10 Jesus is "presented as a superior *pontifex maximus* presiding over an eternal kingdom, compared with the office held by the Roman emperor that lasted until the time of his apotheosis."[51] What is in question is precisely whether this is actually a "comparison" that would have come to the mind for the author and the first readers.

At the end of Chapter 4, Winter explicitly comments on the *reason* for the lexical overlap that leads to those cases of "inevitable ideological clash." He says that it would be "wrong to conclude Christians borrowed [the divine titles] from Rome."[52] After all, it would provide "no advantages whatsoever for their movement if the first Christians themselves awarded titles to Jesus because it would be a highly confrontational move, indeed a treasonable one against Rome."[53] Rather, Winter identifies the Old Testament as the source for the majority of divine titles that are used for Jesus. That the same terms were also used for the Roman emperor, was an "unhappy coincidence" that would "prove to be an enormous challenge for the first generation of Christians."[54] The notion that – with regard to the conflict as a whole – the Christians perceived many expressions of imperatorial ideology as an attack on their world view in the sense that Christ's superiority was primary is indeed a plausible assumption.[55] However, this can hardly explain the use of technical Roman terms and such lexemes, where unprovocative alternatives existed.[56] By way of illustration, it can hardly be coincidental that in 2 Cor 2:14 Paul uses – of all possible images – a scenery in which God takes the role *of the Roman emperor*.[57] Thus, this assumption of Winter's approach raises the question of whether this move might not downplay some of the most intriguing dynamics in the first Christians' responses to Roman imperatorial ideology! Also, note that this assessment indicates that, in principle, Winter sides with Wright and Elliott on the question of the relationship between New Testament writings and public discourse (see above).

4. Winter's Analysis of Christian Responses

Chapter 6 begins the second part of the book, which focuses explicitly on the first Christians' responses to Caesar's divine honours. Interestingly, this opening case study does not contain much on this topic. It is an intriguing analysis of Paul's Aeropagus speech and his visit to Athens in general, but the interaction with Roman ideology comes into view only at the margins. Still, the conflict Winter points to here is plausibly argued for and not often noticed. The point of departure for Winter's argument is the view that Paul's speech can be best interpreted against the background of the petition for admitting new gods to Athens.[58] This claim is framed by contextual observations that attest that, on the one hand, imperial cults were active in Athens, in particular under Claudius and Nero,[59] while, on the other hand, philosophical disdain for emperor worship was transformed by public pressure into an accommodation of Epicureans and Stoics in the first century CE, "adjusting their beliefs to contemporary practices for themselves and their followers."[60] Winter concludes, convincingly, that the same would have had applied to Paul's converts mentioned in Acts 17:34. On the basis of (a) the prevalence of imperial cults in Athens and (b) building on his exegesis of the concrete statements regarding idol worship in the speech (to which he seems to attribute a high degree of historicity on the basis of its close resemblance of established praxis of introducing gods to Athens), and (c) combining this with the notion of social pressure experienced by the philosophical schools, Winter concludes: "The archaeological and epigraphic evidence from the eras of both emperors [Claudius and Nero] helps us understand the enormous pressure on everyone to confirm. However, the first Athenian converts in the time of Claudius could not, for the reasons Paul gave in his *apologia* before the Aeropagus Council."[61]

Thus, Winter succeeds in plausibly reconstructing something like an inevitable conflict between

imperial cults and early Christians in 51 CE.[62] However, the way they *did respond* to this challenge remains unknown, and, accordingly, the episode makes only a small contribution to the question of *how* exactly the early Pauline communities coped with this problem. Still, Winter's recourse to the accommodation of philosophers, might offer further insights into this question. As he notes, the withdrawal from public life "as a silent condemnation of the Principate" by Stoics was "rightly interpreted as a highly visible protest."[63] The focus on critical stances of *non-Jewish* intellectuals as an analogy to early Christian responses to divine honours seems to be a promising starting point indeed.[64] What exactly were the constraints they experienced – and what were the freedoms they could enjoy in expressing their thoughts without experiencing persecution? How did specific circumstances – location, relationship to the imperial family, etc. – influence the limits of that kind of freedom of speech?[65] Answers to these questions might help to shed light on specific early Christian *texts* – which are, after all, the only sources from which we can extract responses to imperial cults, as we can also postulate them for people like Dionysius – himself a member of the Aeropagus – and Damaris.

Like Chapter 6, Chapter 7 offers rich insights into how imperial cults were interwoven with the everyday life – this time in the province of Achaea. However, it remains rather vague with regard to the actual topic of this part of the book – the Christian responses. In fact, most of this chapter would seem to fit far better in the first half of the book. This is true in particular for Winter's discussion of imperial cults in Achaea on the basis of evidence from Messene, a site that is indeed too often neglected in works of NT background. Based on, among other things, *SEG* 23.206, Winter shows that (a) "proconsuls actively promoted imperial divine veneration" so that it was "not just leading provincial citizens or Roman resident businessmen who did this,"[66] that (b) they could use their office to ensure "that divine honours to the Caesars were firmly implemented and established province-wide,"[67] and that (c) "all inhabitants" were expected to wear wreaths and to sacrifice to celebrate Gaius's escape from danger (cf. ll. 13–14).[68] Turning to Corinth, Winter makes the similarly convincing case that "the Corinthians were deeply involved with imperial cultic activities long before Paul evangelized there."[69] To be sure, his discussion is of relevance for those scholars primarily interested in the question no. 4 mentioned above, since it forcefully argues that some kind of exposure needs to be assumed. Still, with regard to specific texts (Winter refers to 1 Cor 8:5.10), exegetes will also have to take into account the *broader* religious context in Corinth.[70] Then, discussing the Gallio incident, Winter turns to the situation of the Christians and argues that Gallio's ruling "must have been totally unexpected because [the Christians] were declared to be *de facto* a Jewish gathering."[71] In light of Winter's earlier discussion of Jewish praxis (see Chapter 5), this implies "that these Christians did not have to offer divine honours to Claudius or any other imperial gods, as Jews had secured a concession from such participation."[72] Even if one follows Winter's interpretation of the incident – which might have been further developed in dialogue with recent research on *collegia* – the result does not tell us very much about the first Christians' "responses" to divine honours for Roman emperors. True, Winter's conclusion indicates indeed that this perception by outsiders might have decreased some of the pressure the Christians would have experienced otherwise. On the other hand, many questions remain open: (a) Does the all-encompassing rhetoric of, e.g., *SEG* 23.206.13–14 really imply that people who did not participate in public celebrations for the emperor ran the risk of being socially stigmatised, or is it not more realistic to assume that people stayed away from such events for all kinds of reasons without serious consequences? (b) Is a thorough withdrawal from all public events concerning the emperor really something that the first Christians would have regarded as a necessary consequence of their worldview, or is it more likely that they attempted to demonstrate their loyalty in every possible way and only abstained from those events that they felt were too much associated with pagan rituals? (c) Does Gallio's ruling imply that the reluctance of Corinthian Christians with regard to imperial cults would no longer have strained their social relations, or is it not more likely to assume that they experienced the same dynamics, though perhaps to a lesser degree, as they would have faced without that decision? In any case, Winter's analysis so far seems to have confirmed that these Christians lived in complex times, in

which they were confronted with many difficult decisions as to how to behave within the network of their social relations, including with regard to the aspect of imperial cults. This clears the ground for, but does not seem to *contribute* much yet, to the question of *how* the first Christians *did respond* to divine honours to the Roman emperors.

Chapter 8 then focuses for the first time on the aspect dealt with in question (b) – the question concerning the thoroughgoingness of Christian withdrawal from imperial cults in the broadest sense. Here, Winter interprets statements on "many gods and lords" that are "in heaven and on earth" (1 Cor 8:5), the reclining in an idol's temple (1 Cor 8:10), and the resulting communion with the δαιμόνια (1 Cor 10:20–21) against the background of the establishment of the federal imperial cult in Corinth. In Winter's analysis, this innovation in late-54/early-55 CE[73] put some Corinthian Christians in the situation that they decided that they would participate in such celebrations. They did so although they were under no obligation due to Gallio's ruling. Rather they did so because they wanted to make use of their civic "right" (1 Cor 8:9), possibly due to their social status.[74] Winter's interpretation is contested with regard to many of the details,[75] such as the question of whether ἐξουσία should be understood in such a civic sense. What makes his framework attractive is, first, that the introduction of the federal imperial cult would have meant an important development for the city,[76] in the first place, and, secondly, that it is indeed a natural assumption that Paul's discussion "implies they were in new territory facing a cultic innovation that was introduced after Paul's departure."[77] Be that as it may, even if Paul was referring to a more general phenomenon, it is certainly plausible that both the Corinthian praxis as well as Paul's attitude give us genuine insight into how the first Christians would have responded to honours for the Roman emperor that involved a cultic context. Thus, Winter's conclusion probably contains much historical truth, even if one were unwilling to follow his specific proposal. Accordingly, Christians, particularly of elevated social status, would have been tempted to rationalize "their participation, justifying their decision on the theological premise that 'an idol is nothing and that there is no God but one.'"[78] Paul's "response" to them – and, thus, to the presupposed divine honours for the Caesars – would have looked different: For him, "they were guilty of severely compromising their faith by drinking from the cup of the divine *genii* of the Caesars 'in heaven and on earth' who were regarded by their compatriots as present and feasting with them at the table."[79] "Fleeing idolatry" (1 Cor 10:14) and "doing everything to the glory of God" (1 Cor 10:31) would have been the command of the apostle in such a situation – "something they clearly could not have claimed to be doing by attending these imperial cultic feasts and the entertainment provided in conjunction with the wider celebrations in Corinth."[80] Yet one wonders whether the "responses" contained in the Corinthian correspondence might not also be identified in other places – and there perhaps even more explicitly: What, above all, about the "rulers of this age" that are said to be doomed (1 Cor 2:8–10), and what about the metaphor of God exhibiting the apostle and his co-workers "in a triumphal procession" (2 Cor 2:14) – besides the reference to οἱ ἐκ τῆς Καίσαρος οἰκίας in Phil 4:22, this latter passage is, after all, the clearest reference to the Roman emperor in the *Corpus Paulinum*.[81]

As with Chapter 8, Chapter 9 takes up earlier research by Winter. His analysis of the situation in Galatia is updated in that it responds to the discussion as stimulated by Hardin[82] concerning the causes behind the controversy regarding circumcision. As with regard to the Corinthian correspondence, Winter does not include other passages in his discussion – which is unfortunate since it might have been of interest to see how Witulski's thesis on the τὰ ἀσθενῆ καὶ πτωχὰ στοιχεῖα might relate to Winter's broader question.[83] Winter again builds on his observation that Jews could abstain from explicit cultic actions associated with the Roman emperor and thinks that this is the background of the conflict over the demand towards the Galatians to be circumcised: "If all Christians were circumcised, they could legitimately meet once a week, be seen to be Jewish by following the Torah as a canon by which they lived and also claim that appropriate cultic honours were being given to the Caesars in the temple in Jerusalem within the legitimate parameters of the Jewish faith."[84] Again, much will depend on whether one is willing to accept the individual

exegetical conclusions by Winter, for example, his argument that in Gal 6:12 θέλουσιν εὐπροσωπῆσαι ἐν σαρκι refers to attaining a "recognized legal status" by means of circumcision in order to avoid "prosecution."[85] Again, while many will remain unconvinced that in the case of the consideration of the possibility to get circumcised we are dealing with an early Christian "response" to emperor worship, Paul's statement in Gal 6:13–16 can indeed be applied to a situation in which "boasting in a culturally acceptable *persona* to avoid any persecution"[86] might have been an option – a situation that certainly would have faced some of the first Christians, regardless of whether this was the case in Galatia or not.

Turning to the Thessalonian Christians in Chapter 10, Winter moves onto more uncontroversial grounds, since Acts 17:7 at least documents that the Pauline mission was understood as reacting against the "decrees of Caesar" (τῶν δογμάτων Καίσαρος) on the basis that they were saying that there was another king, Jesus. Responding to Hardin's proposal according to which the legal background has to do with illegal assemblies,[87] Winter argues that if this were the case, the Christian community might have continued to be associated with a problematic legal status later. His suggestion is that the close connection of imperial decrees with the emperor's name *and titles,* resulted in the impression that by proclaiming another king, namely Jesus, as Messiah, "the Christians could be seen to be rejecting not only the divine, imperial titles but *ipso facto* the validity of all his official imperial decrees that were sent from Rome, in this case, by Claudius."[88] As 1 Thess 1:9–10 indicates, the Thessalonians had understood their loyalty to their new king Jesus to include abstaining from "giving any divine honours before the statue of Claudius in the imperial cult temple or at other events connected with imperial divine honours in Thessalonica."[89] After having paid a "security"[90] and after Silas and Paul had left immediately the further details of how the Christians managed to get along remain unknown.[91] According to Winter, the subject surfaces again, however, in 2 Thess 2:1–5, which he regards to come from Paul himself. While the language is said to be "reminiscent" of Dan 11:36–37, it is also said to "resonate" with language that is found "in official inscriptions in the East relating to the Julio-Claudian emperors."[92] Winter is hesitant to follow any of the specific suggestions concerning which emperor(s) might be in view (Caligula? Claudius? Nero?).[93] He puts the emphasis on the fact that the passage reflects the situation the Thessalonian Christians found themselves in "from 'day one.'"[94] They had stopped participating "in giving divine imperial honours" as attested by 1 Thess 1:9–10 and as confirmed by 2 Thess 1:4–7. The specific contribution of this passage is that it warns them "to expect ongoing confrontation over the 'so-called' imperial gods as confirmed by their present suffering."[95]

Chapter 11 continues this thought of *actual* suffering because of faithfulness to the confession to Christ with regard to the letter to the Hebrews. According to Winter's reconstruction, the letter gives insight into a situation of intense conflict due to imperial cults, which is quite similar to later persecution as described by Pliny the Younger.[96] In particular, he argues that Heb 10:32–34 speaks of a series of punishments, – the display in the theatre,[97] public scourging,[98] imprisonment,[99] and confiscation of possessions.[100] Heb 13:12–14 additionally implies the penalty of exile.[101] The legal background to all this is once again seen in the evaluation of the Christian meetings as illegal *collegia.*[102] Given our lack of knowledge concerning date, location, and social setting of both letter as well as addressees, Winter's position is probably as good as any.[103] It is supported in particular by the depiction of Judaism as "the save haven … to escape ignominy and suffering."[104] With regard to the details of Winter's construction, the hints in the text often do not seem to suffice to make his conclusions. In particular, it seems doubtful that the penalty of exile is really the foil against which Heb 13:12–14 is to be interpreted or whether social exclusion in general does not explain the text equally well. While the reference to a "lasting city" (Heb 13:14)[105] and the perpetual divinity of Christ (Heb 1:2–3)[106] might have indeed *resonated* with current Roman ideas, it is at least conspicuous that emperor worship is not addressed explicitly in the letter if this is the decisive context for understanding the suffering of the addressees.

In Chapter 12, Winter contrasts the fate of exile of Heb 13:13 with "summary execution" implied by Rev 13:15–17.[107] With regard to the significance of imperial cults for understanding Revelation, Winter builds on a consensus in scholarship. His particular contribution lies in arguing for persecution under Nero (rather than Domitian) as the decisive background.[108] He also supports this claim by identifying the "second beast" of Rev 13:11, not with the provincial high priest, but with the governor for the death sentence (Rev 13:15) would have been within the realm of his jurisdiction.[109] Thus, according to Winter, Fonteius Agrippa was responsible for "yet another provincial innovation aimed at securing an imperial benefit for the province," which – in light of other evidence for Neronian policies – might have been tax exemption for the province of Asia.[110]

5. Conclusions

Winter ends his chapter on Revelation with a short comment that also epitomises the whole book: "This study has shown it was an inevitable confrontation that [the Christians] faced with the imperial powers because of the demand to render divine honours to the Caesars, something they could never do in all good conscience given their allegiance to their new king."[111] This statement contains several of the main claims of Winter's work: (1) There was a demand to demonstrate loyalty by rendering divine honours to the Roman emperors that applied to all citizens. (2) As soon as the Christians were not regarded to be part of Judaism, this pressure applied to them also. (3) For theological reasons they could not participate in cultic events of that kind (although at least some Corinthians had done so). (4) This refusal could lead to persecution on both local as well as provincial level, which is reflected in several of the NT writings.

There is indeed no reason to presuppose that conflicts of that kind might not have happened early on.[112] Thus, Winter's study should be taken as further confirmation that this background should be taken seriously for the interpretation of writings in the NT as early as the letters of Paul. However, it is more difficult to determine exactly how strong this case is. For example, with regard to Winter's claim no. 1, it seems doubtful that the all-encompassing rhetoric reflected in official inscriptions necessarily reflected everyday realities. Sure, reluctance to participate in events that involved large parts of the public might easily have evoked an anti-social impression. Still, it does not follow necessarily that Christians would not have attempted to demonstrate their loyalty by other means, nor can we simply presuppose that their contemporaries would have attributed the same significance to their abstaining from the imperial cults as Winter suggests. Further, there was no doubt a danger that the Christians made the impression of being dangerous *collegia* – and there are several parties that would have had an interest in pursuing pursue such accusations[113] – but it is likely that such associations were dealt with in a more variegated manner than Winter suggests.[114]

Proposition no. 3 points to yet another aspect that one might highlight in critical dialogue with Winter. It is right that the early Christians' *theology* would have had very concrete implications for their behaviour in everyday life. However, the "demand to render divine honours to the Caesars" would have been only one of many challenges within a pagan environment. Even if one grants a certain primacy to emperor worship over other pressing issues of their time,[115] this still raises the question of whether focusing on imperial cults really give us a comprehensive idea of *the early Christians' relation to the Roman Empire in general.* To be fair, Winter's explicit claim is not to provide such a thoroughgoing account. Rather, he justifies his more narrow focus on "divine honours" with reference to later persecution and the resulting need for a similar analysis for the first generation of Christians. Still, this limitation of *Divine Honours for the Caesars* should be kept in mind. It inevitably leads to a restriction to such "responses" that explicitly react to concrete *demands of cultic actions*. This paradigm, however, can scarcely account for the entirety of the many different ways in which the early Christians might have been confronted with "imperial ideology"[116] in general and for the manifold ways in which they might have thought and engaged with notions relating to emperor worship in particular. Therefore, it is not surprising that Winter's reconstruction of the "responses" is quite simple in the end: Christians were confronted with the "unhappy coincidence" (see above) that

because of their theological commitments they could not give in to the social pressure of their time to participate in the imperial cults. Some Christians gave in to some extent, justifying this on theological grounds as well. This, in turn, was criticised by Paul by means of theological reasoning. Most Christians stayed loyal to Christ, however, and did not take part in emperor worship. Some tried to avoid persecution by strengthening their association with Judaism, while those who did not do so experienced sufferings of various kinds. What does not seem to be involved in this reconstruction are more subtle forms of engagement with Roman ideology. The high degree of danger looming over all Christians in Winter's proposal seems to necessitate urgent decisions of individuals concerning cultic practice – but, at the same time, does not seem to leave much room for calmer contemplation. Accordingly, Winter does not refer at all, for example, to Rom 1:3–4. If that passage displayed *resonances* of emperor worship,[117] this could hardly count as an "unhappy coincidence" but would rather presuppose a rather conscious move on Paul's side to begin his letter with a contrast between Christ and Caesar. Similar things could be said with regard to Phil 2:6–11 – which is only mentioned by Winter in passing[118] – in light of its very specific pragmatic function in the letter.[119] These observations point back to our analysis of Winter's approach in comparison to other recent research on the topic of Empire. Not making recourse to notions such as "echoes" of the Empire and "hidden transcripts," Winter does also not participate explicitly in – nor contribute implicitly to – the ongoing discussions in that area. This is also reflected in the fact that many of the biblical passages that are adduced in that discourse do nor surface at all in Winter's discussion.[120] Thus, Winter's basic approach to research can both be regarded as giving rise to the strengths as well as the weaknesses, or at least limitations, of his work in relation to the broader debate concerning "Paul and Empire": On the one hand, his focus on primary evidence allows him to reconstruct a context in which the question imposes itself forcefully on the readers of how Christians behaved in this situation and whether one should not expect this conflict to be reflected in the NT writings. On the other hand, Winter's disinterest in current considerations on methodological aspects of the varied ways in which early Christian writers might have interacted with the Roman sphere also leads to a picture of the first Christians' "responses" to divine honours of Caesars that one might judge to be too one-dimensional to satisfactorily account for the diversity as well as the profundity of Christians reactions to the Roman empire.[121]

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[1] I am grateful to Wayne Coppins for discussing this essay with me.

[2] Bruce W. Winter, *Philo and Paul among the Sophists: Alexandrian and Corinthian Responses to a Julio-Claudian Movement*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002); *Roman Wives, Roman Widows: The Appearance of New Women and the Pauline Communities* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003).

[3] On "abduction," cf. Theresa Heilig and Christoph Heilig, "Historical Methodology," in *God and the Faithfulness of Paul: A Critical Examination of the Pauline Theology of N. T. Wright,* ed. Christoph Heilig, J. Thomas Hewitt, and Michael F. Bird, WUNT II 413 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2016), 115–50.

[4] For a shorter more concise analysis of Winter's contribution, see my review in *JTS:* Christoph Heilig, review of *Divine Honours for the Caesars,* by Bruce W. Winter, *JTS* 67 (2016): http://jts.oxfordjournals.org/content/early/2016/11/18/jts.flw163.full.pdf+html (http://jts.oxfordjournals.org/content/early/2016/11/18/jts.flw163.full.pdf+html).

[5] Bruce W. Winter, *Divine Honours for the Caesars: The First Christians' Responses* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015), ix.

[6] On potential problems of neglecting methodological considerations in favour of a focus on

primary evidence itself within the Judge school, cf. also Christoph Heilig, *Hidden Criticism? The Methodology and Plausibility of the Search for a Counter-Imperial Subtext in Paul,* WUNT II 392 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck), 26n21.

[7] Winter, *Divine Honours,* 1–3.

[8] Winter, *Divine Honours,* 2.

[9] Winter, *Divine Honours,* 3–5.

[10] Winter, *Divine Honours,* 5.

[11] S. R. F. Price, *Rituals and Power: The Roman Imperial Cult in Asia Minor* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984).

[12] Duncan Fishwick, *The Imperial Cult in the Latin West,* 3 vols., RGRW (Leiden: Brill, 1987–2004).

[13] Winter, *Divine Honours,* 9.

[14] Winer, *Divine Honours,* 9–15.

[15] Winter, *Divine Honours,* 12.

[16] Winter, *Divine Honours,* 9–11.

[17] Winter, *Divine Honours,* 11.

[18] Winter, *Divine Honours,* 11–12.

[19] Winter, *Divine Honours,* 14.

[20] Winter, *Divine Honours,* 12–13. Note that he says that his earlier views "have undergone something of a meta-morphosis" in some areas.

[21] On this debate, mainly initiated by David G. Horrell, see now David I. Starling, "'She Who Is in Babylon': 1 Peter and the Hermeneutics of Empire," in *Reactions to Empire,* ed. John Anthony Dunne and Dan Batovici, WUNT 372 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014), 111–128.

[22] Winter, *Divine Honours,* 10n30. James R. Harrison, *Paul and the Imperial Authorities at Thessalonica and Rome,* WUNT 273 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011).

[23] Winter, *Divine Honours,* 13. Joseph D. Fantin, *The Lord of the Entire World: Lord Jesus, a Challenge to Lord Caesar,* New Testament Monographs 31 (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2011).

[24] Cf., in particular, Warren Carter, "Paul and the Roman Empire: Recent Perspectives," in *Paul Unbound: Other Perspectives on the Apostle,* ed. Mark D. Given (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2009), 7–26.

[25] For an analysis of their methodology, see chapter 2 of Christoph Heilig, *Hidden Criticism? The Methodology and Plausibility of the Search for a Counter-Imperial Subtext in Paul,* WUNT II 392 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2015).

[26] Richard B. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989).

[27] James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990). Cf. Chapter 3 of Heilig, *Hidden Criticism?*.

[28] See Seyoon Kim, *Christ and Caesar: The Gospel and the Roman Empire in the Writings of Paul and Luke* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), and now also "Paul and the Roman Empire," in *God and the Faithfulness of Paul: A Critical Examination of the Pauline Theology of N. T. Wright*, ed. Christoph Heilig, J. Thomas Hewitt, and Michael F. Bird, WUNT II 413 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2016), 277–308.

[29] John M. G. Barclay, "Why the Roman Empire was Insignificant to Paul," in *Pauline Churches and Diaspora Jews,* WUNT 275 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011).

[30] N. T. Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, Christian Origins and the Question of God 4 (London: SPCK, 2013), chapter 12; see now Heilig and Heilig, "Methodology," 145–48, for an analysis of this discourse.

[31] Heilig, *Hidden Criticism?*, 54–67.

[32] Winter, *Divine Honours,* 16.

[33] Still, one might want to point to the fact that Winter, *Divine Honours,* 14 mentions "a long-standing interest in the problem that imperial veneration created for Christians in the Book of Revelation" but does not mention the trend of anti-imperial interpretations of Paul at all in this context although it would certainly been appropriate here. However, it is not important for a fair analysis of Winter's work whether he is unaware of this discussion or whether he has ignored it intentionally. Our interest is in the role that his contribution can play in the larger, implicit, field.

[34] Winter, *Divine Honours,* 29. Cf. also Winter, *Divine Honours,* 33.

[35] Winter, *Divine Honours,* 48 rightly cautions against assuming a monolithic notion of *the* imperial cult.

[36] See, e.g., Winter, *Divine Honours,* 53: "Christians would have to deal with the high-profile imperial cult celebrations with all citizens wearing wreaths and taking part in sacrifices performed to the gods in the imperial high and holy days." See also Winter, *Divine Honours,* 59: "There was no dichotomy between politics and cults in die minds of first-century citizens. This is important to understand, as it explains just how intrusive the cult really was in the cities and lives of the inhabitants of the Roman Empire."

[37] Cf. Winter, *Divine Honours,* 87: "The vital pieces of official evidence concerning cult paid to Tiberius can be easily overlooked and sole credence given to his official rejecting 'honours equal to the gods' taken at face value. That latter disclaimer has long been invoked by New Testament scholars of previous generations in support of their view that the imperial cult was not operative until the reign of Domitian." He refers to Cuss here.

[38] Cf. Heilig, *Hidden Criticism?*, 82–108, in dialogue with, in particular, the minimalist account of Miller.

[39] Cf. also Heilig, *Hidden Criticism?*, 78–85. I am not sure whether his characterization of the view by Justin K. Hardin, *Galatians and the Imperial Cult,* WUNT II 237 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008) is correct. Winter, *Divine Honours,* 117, seems to imply that the converse of the argument by Hardin is that "Jews 'participated' in imperial cultic activities." His differentiation between "cult" and "loyalty" (Winter, *Divine Honours,* 118) seems, however, not to contradict Hardin's assessment but simply to use a different concept of "imperial cults." Cf. Heilig, *Hidden Criticism?*, 81.

[40] Winter, *Divine Honours,* 5.

[41] Cf. also Winter, *Divine Honours,* 28: "'messianic' blessings"; See, for a more elaborate explication,

Winter, *Divine Honours,* 44, with reference to a formulation in Erik Wistrand, *Felicitas Imperatoria,* Studia Graeca et Latina Gothoburgensia 48 (Gothenburg: Acta Universitatis Gothoburgensis, 1987), 6.

[42] Winter, *Divine Honours,* 12, with reference to Karl Galinsky, "In the Shadow (or Not) of the Imperial Cult: A Cooperative Agenda," in *Rome and Religion: A Cross-Disciplinary Dialogue on the Imperial Cult,* ed. Jeffrey Brodd and Jonathan L. Reed, WGRW 5 (Atlanta: Scholars Press), 118–20.

[43] Winter, *Divine Honours,* 38.

[44] Winter, *Divine Honours,* 71.

[45] Winter, *Divine Honours,* 37.

[46] Winter, *Divine Honours,* 62.

[47] Winter, *Divine Honours,* 61–77. For a response that overlaps significantly with some of Winter's considerations, cf. Heilig, *Hidden Criticism?,* 150–55.

[48] Barclay, "Roman Empire," 376: "The question is whether this overlap of vocabulary implies an antithetical relationship between the two domains, and, conversely, whether Paul's antithetical constructs place Christ or the church in opposition to the Roman empire in the way suggested by Wright and others." For an analysis of this objection, see Heilig, *Hidden Criticism?,* 139–55 and also the comments in Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God,* 1312.

[49] An exception is the reference to the "important monograph" by Fantin, *Lord,* in the discussion of the designation "lord" (Winter, *Divine Honours,* 76).

[50] Winter, *Divine Honours,* 74.

[51] Winter, *Divine Honours,* 76.

[52] Winter, *Divine Honours,* 92.

[53] Winter, *Divine Honours,* 92.

[54] Winter, *Divine Honours,* 93.

[55] On intentionality, cf. Heilig, *Hidden Criticism?,* 129–36. On technical terms and confrontation, see the conclusions in Heilig, *Hidden Criticism?,* 122–23.

[56] Cf. also the conclusions in Heilig, *Hidden Criticism?,* 156–60.

[57] See now Christoph Heilig, *Paul's Triumph: Reassessing 2 Corinthians 2:14 in Its Literary and Historical Context,* BTS 27 (Leuven: Peeters, 2016), Chapter 8.

[58] Winter, *Divine Honours,* 141–48.

[59] Winter, *Divine Honours,* 128–40.

[60] Winter, *Divine Honours,* 149–56. The quote is from Winter, *Divine Honours,* 156.

[61] Winter, *Divine Honours,* 158.

[62] Winter, *Divine Honours,* 158.

[63] Winter, *Divine Honours,* 150.

[64] Cf. Heilig, *Hidden Criticism?*, 82.

[65] For a short historical overview on censorship in the Early Principate, cf. Heilig, *Hidden Criticism?*, 85–88, building in particular on Rudich.

[66] Winter, *Divine Honours,* 171.

[67] Winter, *Divine Honours,* 179.

[68] Winter, *Divine Honours,* 178.

[69] Winter, *Divine Honours,* 192.

[70] Cf. Heilig, *Hidden Criticism?*, 150, passim. On the passage: Heilig, *Hidden Criticism?*, 100. See now James Constantine Hanges, "'A World of Shrines and Groves': N. T. Wright and Paul among the Gods," in *God and the Faithfulness of Paul: A Critical Examination of the Pauline Theology of N. T. Wright,* ed. Christoph Heilig, J. Thomas Hewitt, and Michael F. Bird, WUNT II 413 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2016), 255–76 on Corinth and imperial cults among other cults.

[71] Winter, *Divine Honours,* 195.

[72] Winter, *Divine Honours,* 195.

[73] Winter, *Divine Honours,* 196.

[74] Winter, *Divine Honours,* 196.

[75] Winter has modified his interpretation, which he had put forward in different places before, in some regards. Cf. Winter, *Divine Honours,* 198.

[76] Winter, *Divine Honours,* 209.

[77] Winter, *Divine Honours,* 197. Though one could, of course, reply that 1 Cor 6:15–16 also does not imply that prostitution at banquets was only introduced to Corinth after Paul had left. Cf. Bruce W. Winter, *After Paul Left Corinth: The Influence of Secular Ethics and Social Change* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 86–89 on this passage.

[78] Winter, *Divine Honours,* 225.

[79] Winter, *Divine Honours,* 225.

[80] Winter, *Divine Honours,* 225.

[81] Heilig, *Paul's Triumph,* 263.

[82] Cf. Winter, *Divine Honours,* 226.

[83] Thomas Witulski, *Die Aressaten des Galaterbriefes: Untersuchungen zur Gemeinde von Antiochia ad Pisidiam,* FRLANT 193 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2000). A brief reference to Gal 4:10 is made in Winter, *Divine Honours,* 249n75.

[84] Winter, *Divine Honours,* 241.

[85] Winter, *Divine Honours,* 248.

[86] Winter, *Divine Honours,* 248.

[87] Justin K. Hardin, "Decrees and Drachmas at Thessalonica: An Illegal Assembly in Jason's House (Acts 17.1–10a)," *NTS* 52 (2006): 29–49. Cf. Heilig, *Hidden Criticism?*, 81.

[88] Winter, *Divine Honours,* 255.

[89] Winter, *Divine Honours,* 255.

[90] Cf. Winter, *Divine Honours,* 258, in interaction with Hardin's proposal.

[91] Cf. Winter, *Divine Honours,* 254, for the possibility that they would "subsequently have been seen in the eyes of the officials as another synagogue."

[92] Winter, *Divine Honours,* 261.

[93] Winter, *Divine Honours,* 263–64.

[94] Winter, *Divine Honours,* 264.

[95] Winter, *Divine Honours,* 265.

[96] Winter, *Divine Honours,* 277.

[97] Winter, *Divine Honours,* 269. On θεατρίζειν, see now Heilig, *Paul's Triumph,* 110–111.

[98] Winter, *Divine Honours,* 270–71.

[99] Winter, *Divine Honours,* 271–73.

[100] Winter, *Divine Honours,* 273.

[101] Winter, *Divine Honours,* 278–89. With regard to this aspect, Winter also makes brief reference to the work of Jason A. Whitlark, *Resisting Empire: Rethinking the Purpose of the Letter to "the Hebrews,"* LNTS 484 (London: T&T Clark, 2014), which probably came too late to be incorporated in more detail.

[102] Winter, *Divine Honours,* 276.

[103] Most exegetes agree that the background to 10:32–35 is some kind of concrete experience of persecution. Contrast Erich Gräßer, *An die Hebräer,* EKKNT 12 (Zurich: Benziger, 1997), 3:62–63, who speaks of "vergebliche Forschermüh" and assumes that these verses only aim to illustrate an experience of suffering that was common everywhere.

[104] Winter, *Divine Honours,* 284.

[105] Winter, *Divine Honours,* 280.

[106] Winter, *Divine Honours,* 266.

[107] Winter, *Divine Honours,* 286.

[108] Winter, *Divine Honours,* 292n22.

[109] Winter, *Divine Honours,* 297.

[110] Winter, *Divine Honours,* 303. Cf. Winter, *Divine Honours,* 306.

[111] Winter, *Divine Honours,* 306.

[112] Cf. also Heilig, *Hidden Criticism?*, 88–89.

[113] Heilig, *Hidden Criticism?*, 62–63. Cf. Heilig, *Hidden Criticism?*, 89.

[114] Cf. Heilig, *Hidden Criticism?*, 62, for references.

[115] I think there is a certain justification for this. See Heilig, *Hidden Criticism?*, 98–108.

[116] Cf. also Heilig, *Hidden Criticism?*, 70–91. On the terminology, see Heilig, *Hidden Criticism?*, 90.

[117] Cf. Heilig, *Hidden Criticism?*, 157. On the terminology, see Heilig, *Paul's Triumph*, Chapter 7.

[118] Winter, *Divine Honours*, 73.

[119] Cf. Heilig, *Hidden Criticism?*, 157–58.

[120] This is even true for the *locus classicus* of such an interpretation, 1 Thess 5:3. Cf. Heilig, *Hidden Criticism?*, 140–43 and 157.

[121] Cf. also the contributions in the very similarly titled volume *Reactions to Empire*, ed. John Anthony Dunne and Dan Batovici, WUNT 372 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014).

2 Responses